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ABSTRACT

General Social Surveys data for 1980 and 1982-86 were used in this study of the marital happiness of black husbands and wives who resided with their spouses. The dependent variable was marital happiness; independent variables of greatest interest concerned parenting. The study was designed to provide detailed information on relationships between demographic, situational, and interactional variables and marital happiness among recent national probability samples of black husbands and wives. Although the study focused on parental variables, several potentially confounding variables were also investigated. Findings indicated that the presence of minor children at home was significantly related to parents' marital happiness. However, the relationship was complex and involved the ages and numbers of the children. Sex of parent was an important variable, with mothers more negatively affected than fathers, by numbers and ages of children in the home. Husbands were happiest with their marriages in families with preschool or teenage children, while wives were happiest with few or no minor children, or with preschool children. Additional variables such as income, age, education, health, frequency of church attendance, spouse's education, number of children born, and number of persons in the household were also investigated for their relationship to marital happiness. Forty references are included. (RH)

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CHILDREN AND MARITAL

HAPPINESS OF BLACK AMERICANS

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This research uses data from the General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

ABSTRACT

Using NORC data for 1980-86, this research reports on the marital happiness of black husbands and wives residing with their spouses. Having minor children at home is significantly related to their parents' marital happiness, although the relationship is complex, and involves ages of the children and their numbers. In addition, sex of parent is an important variable, with mothers more negatively affected than fathers. Husbands are happiest with their marriages with preschool or teenage children, wives with few or no minor children, or with preschool children. Additional variables such as income, age, education, health, frequency of church attendance, spouse's education, number of children ever born, and number of persons in the household also are investigated for their relationship to marital happiness for these black spouses.

INTRODUCTION

Family researchers have completed numerous studies of marital happiness or satisfaction, psychological distress associated with marital roles, and marital stability during the last 20 or more years. A development of the earlier work begun in the 1930's by pioneers such as Bernard, Burgess and Cottrell, and Terman, these studies often have sought correlates of differing levels of perceived well-being or stress within marriages, or of divorce, and have become increasingly sophisticated in their method and scope. Paramount among methodological advances made in the study area are the recent use of national probability samples and multivariate analysis (Glenn and Weaver, 1978; McLanahan and Adams, 1987; Nye, 1988; Spanier and Lewis, 1980).

Among the many correlates of marital well-being that have been investigated, one receiving greatest attention has been parental status. The parental role obviously is one of the most important family and marital roles. In contradiction to traditional values, many studies have found that there is an inverse relationship between perceived marital well-being and being a parent. As McLanahan and Adams (1987) point out, this finding stirs unusual interest in that we have difficulty reconciling that occupying a role that is vital to the continuation of human existence and which has been highly valued is now often associated with less happiness and more stress. However, as research has become more elaborate in recent years, and relationships between being a parent and subjective well-

being are scrutinized in ever more detail, it has become increasingly evident that the relationships between the two may be complex, with the impact of parenting on well-being influenced by a number of other variables. These may include the sex of the parent, the ages, education, and employment statuses of the parents, and family income, as well as the number and ages of the children in the home (see Glenn and McLanahan, 1982; McLanahan and Adams, 1987; Spanier and Lewis, 1980; and White, Booth, and Edwards, 1986, for references).

As with most family research, studies in this area overwhelmingly have focused on the white population. While the professional reward structure as well as ethnocentrism may be involved in this dearth of study of minority families, practical methodological and statistical considerations typically also have deterred in-depth multivariate quantitative study of minorities. With rare exception, large national probability samples available to researchers are drawn from the general U.S. population, of which nearly 80 percent are non-Hispanic whites.[1]

The study reported here is designed to provide detailed information on the relationship between several demographic, situational, and interactional variables and marital happiness among recent national probability samples of black husbands and wives. The focus is on parental variables, but several potentially confounding variables, some of which are of considerable theoretical and practical interest in their own right, also are investigated. Whites are excluded from the data analysis in order to permit a specific focus on data regarding a

highly important American institution: the black family.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have indicated that having minor children at home is inimical to subjective well-being of various types for parents. This often is attributed to the time, effort, worry, and economic costs associated with raising children in an industrial or post-industrial society in which children are non-productive.

One major study of data from the 1970's has focused specifically on the marital happiness of parents, and reported for its black subsample. Using national samples for married persons ages 18 through 59 collected from 1973-78, Glenn and McLanahan (1982) found that having a child under 18 at home was associated with significantly lower marital happiness for black husbands, but not for black wives. However, the number of such children was significantly related to lower happiness for wives, but not for husbands. This latter relationship, however, was no longer significant when controls were added.

White's (1983) study of data gathered during the early 1980's of a national sample of married persons under 55 included blacks, but did not report detailed findings for them. She found that the presence of a child of any age in the home was significantly associated with lower marital happiness. Glenn and Weaver (1978) studied married whites only ages 18-59 for the

years 1973-75 and found that having a minor child at home under 6 was associated with significantly lower marital happiness for wives, but not significantly for husbands. Older children were associated with less happiness for both sexes, but not significantly. A study of employed middle-class white mothers by Abbott and Brody (1985) indicated that having a preschool (but not an infant) child or a male child was significantly related to lowered marital satisfaction.

At least two recently completed studies have examined the relationship of children to the perceived well-being of blacks on other but related domains of life. Ball and Robbins (1986b, 1989) found that having a minor child at home was associated with lower family life satisfaction for both black husbands and wives, but not significantly. Broman (1988), using a much larger sample but reporting for all marital statuses together, found that black parents with minors at home were less satisfied with their lives overall and with their family lives then were non-parents. However, when controls were added, the relationships no longer were significant. Somewhat earlier, Glenn and McLanahan (1981) reported on the family life satisfaction of blacks and found that, with controls in place, black men 50 and over with no children at home who never had a child were more satisfied than those who had. However, no significant difference was found for black women.

The overall picture presented by the studies briefly reviewed here, and other studies referenced in them, is that in general

children may be inimical to marital happiness. However this picture is far from clear, especially for black husbands and wives, for whom so little research has been reported.

At least three important factors must be taken into consideration when studying this topic even in regard to whites, for whom much more data are available.

(1) There is some disagreement as to whether number of children, spacing, or sex of child is as important as the simple presence of at least one child in regard to perceived well-being (McLanahan and Adams, 1987). In addition, the ages of the children may be a factor, as younger children often cause more worry (Abbott and Brody, 1985; Glenn and Weaver, 1978).

(2) Many other variables have been shown to be related to having children and a happy marriage, and may intervene between the two. Thus, additional variables also must be investigated in order to reduce spurious findings (Glenn and Weaver, 1978; McLanahan and Adams, 1987; White et al., 1986).

(3) The relationship between parental status and happiness may be changing through time. McLanahan and Adams (1987) point to studies that indicate a deterioration in marital quality for parents in recent decades, and Glenn and Weaver (1988) convincingly demonstrate a lowering in overall happiness for married adults in the decade between 1972-76 and 1982-86. For blacks, Jackson, Chatters, and Neighbors (1986) show that overall

happiness followed a curvilinear path between 1957 and 1980. Up-to-date survey information therefore are needed for contemporary study.

Finally, study specifically addressing black parents is crucial, as general population or white only sample data may not be valid if generalized to blacks. The heightened importance of the parental role to black women has been stressed by many writers (Rubin, 1978; Willie, 1978). The father role has been seen as much more problematic for black men than white, usually because of marital and family problems associated with economic discrimination (Liebow, 1967; Rainwater, 1970). However, as many studies of the 1960's and 70's focused on the black family as a social problem, much of the writing of that era dealt with the lower or underclass. Overgeneralization of that literature both distorted perceptions of and stigmatized many black Americans, particularly those in self-supporting, intact families. For example, research on middle-class black families by Tatum (1987) found that both fathers and mothers not only stressed the importance of children, but were highly involved in their day-to-day activities. The need is obvious for contemporary study of adequately representative cross sections of the black population, with the inclusion of appropriate control variables.

Family income is a variable important for family functioning and the perceived well-being of members. Numerous studies have found it related to marital satisfaction for whites. (See Glenn and Weaver, 1979; and Spanier and Lewis, 1980, for references.)

Several studies of blacks have found income to be positively associated with marital, life, and family life satisfaction (Ball and Robbins, 1986a, 1986b; Bradburn, 1969; Broman, 1988; Campbell et al., 1976; Coner, 1983; Jackson et al., 1986; Renne, 1970; Scanzoni, 1977). One study found total family income to be more highly correlated with family life satisfaction for black husbands than was their own individual income (Ball and Robbins, 1986b).

Education is another potential factor in individual and family functioning, but may be a two-edged sword in regard to perceived well-being. More education is related to greater competence both within the family and in interaction with and in other institutions, but also is associated with greater expectations, which often go unfulfilled. Husband's education may be indicative of potential for role performance, and thus may be related to black wives' marital satisfaction (Scanzoni, 1977). On the other hand, black wives often have higher education levels than their husbands. What impact does this reversal of general societal norms have on both spouses? Does this undermine the husband's leadership image, ego, and perhaps, his and his wife's marital happiness?

Studies of whites have shown contradictory findings regarding the relationship between education and perceived well-being. (See Ball, 1984, for references.) For blacks, generalization also is difficult. Zollar and Williams (1987) reported a negative relationship between education and marital happiness for black men but a positive one for black women. Some

researchers have found a positive relationship between education and overall well-being (Bradburn, 1969), but others a negative one (Alston, Lowe, and Wrigley, 1974; Broman, 1988). Zollar and Williams (1987) found a curvilinear relationship for women, but a negative one for men. Other studies report a curvilinear relationship overall (Ball and Robbins, 1986a; Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, 1976; Jackson et al., 1986). Two studies found a negative relationship between education and black family life satisfaction (Ball and Robbins 1989; Broman, 1988). The picture presented is far from clear, but it can be seen that sex of respondent may play an important role in the correlation between education and well-being.

Inextricably interlinked with having children at home and their ages is respondent's age. Generally, age has been reported to be positively related to overall subjective well-being for black Americans, as well as to marital happiness (Alston et al., 1974; Ball and Robbins, 1986b; Broman, 1988; Campbell et al., 1976; Zollar and Williams, 1987).

A higher total number of persons in the household can be expected to have a negative effect on marital relations. The research on children and well-being, previously cited, has indicated this potential even within the nuclear family. The addition of other relatives, or friends, often may stem from economic hardship, and can result in crowding and a lack of marital privacy. However, the black family is well known for its adaptability and inclusion of relatives and friends into the

household (Hill, 1972). Thus, this may be less a problem for black spouses than it would be for whites.

Numerous studies have shown health to be positively correlated with various types of subjective well-being for whites (Michalos, 1985), and this holds for blacks, as well (Ball, 1983; Ball and Robbins, 1985, 1986a, 1989; Broman, 1988). However, little is known regarding the relationship specifically between health and marital happiness for black spouses.

Religiosity typically has been viewed as contributing to marital success, or its appearance. Traditional religious views stress the importance of children and the marital relationship. Thus, convention and tradition perhaps have affected the levels of actual and reported marital well-being for the religiously involved. One indicator of religiosity is frequency of church attendance. Using NORC data, Glenn and Weaver (1978) found it highly correlated with marital happiness for whites, but caution that there is a tendency for the more conventional to report frequent church attendance and to over-report their marital happiness. The importance of the black church is well known, as it is the only social institution outside the family that has been and is black controlled (Scanzoni, 1977).

Findings in this study are reported separately for husbands and wives. As Bernard wrote, "there really are two marriages in every union and they do not always coincide" (1972:4, quoted in Spanier and Lewis, 1989). Zollar and Williams (1987) found that black husbands were happier with their marriages than were black

wives. Black husbands in Ball and Robbins's (1989) study were more satisfied with their family lives than were black wives. Studies previously referenced which have reported findings separately for black men and women often have found that variables such as parental status, income, age, and educational level have different relationships to well-being for the two sexes.

This study reports on data for black Americans only. Many other studies, when addressing race at all, have incorporated it as simply one of many variables. This has inevitably resulted in far less information being made available for each individual race.

METHOD

Data used for this study are from the General Social Surveys (GSS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) and made available by the Roper Center. GSS have been conducted annually since 1972, with the exceptions of 1979 and 1981. Face-to-face interviews are conducted with noninstitutionalized respondents age 18 and older residing in the contiguous 48 states, and who have been selected through multistage cluster sampling. Approximately 1500 people are interviewed annually (Davis and Smith, 1986). Being general population samples, respondents overwhelmingly are white. However, by pooling together data from several years' GSS, adequate numbers of black respondents can be obtained for meaningful analysis.

GSS data from 1980 and 1982-86 were selected for inclusion

here. Prior years were deleted in order to lessen the potential for longitudinal change, referenced previously.. In addition, this strategy makes the income variable more meaningful, as inflation was greatly reduced from the decade of the 1970's. A total of 526 valid cases were obtained from the pooled samples, of whom 234 were black husbands and 292 black wives, all residing with their spouses. (As only one person per household was interviewed, no couples are included.) Although not comprising a single probability sample, these respondents can be expected to represent noninstitutionalized married adult black Americans.

The dependent variable of this study is marital happiness. The GSS asks married respondents: "taking all things together, how would you describe your marriage? Would you say that your marriage is "very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?" (Davis and Smith, 1986:172). For this analysis "very happy" is coded 3, "pretty happy" 2, and "not too happy" 1.

Independent variables of greatest interest are in regard to children. The GSS gathers data on several dimensions of parenting. We can determine whether there is a minor child in the home, age category (0-5, 6-12, 13-17 years) of the youngest of these children, and the number of children in each of the three age categories. In addition, the number of children ever born to the respondent is indicated. The total number of persons in residence, including the respondent, spouse, minor and adult children, as well as other relatives and unrelated persons, is determined as well.

Other variables are operationalized as follows. Income is total reported family income for the year preceding data collection. Education and spouse's education are in years completed. Age is age at last birthday, and correlates highly with length of marriage (r = .94 for this sample). Health is subjectively evaluated by the respondents. Subjective health evaluations by interviewees have been shown to be highly correlated with those of health professionals (Palmore and Luikart, 1972).[2] Religiosity is frequency of church attendance.

For bivariate relationships, analysis of variance is used for variables treated as being categorical, with Pearson's r used for variables treated as interval level. The multivariate analysis uses linear regression with pairwise deletion of missing data. To avoid the potential for distortion due to multicollinearity and from having an insufficient number of cases per variable, several variables found in the bivariate analysis are dropped from the regression equations.

The statistical program is SPSS-X. The NORC sampling procedure and the pooling of samples from different years makes possible the overstatement of actual significance levels (Glenn and McLanahan, 1981; Kish, 1965).

Based on prior research, it is hypothesized that higher levels of marital happiness will be evidenced by husbands, and by both husbands and wives who have never had children, have no minor children at home, have fewer children in each age category, who live in households with fewer people, have higher household

income, and who are in better health. Wives whose husbands have higher education levels are expected to be happier with their marriages. Prior findings indicate the difficulty in predicting the relationship between respondent's education and marital happiness.

FINDINGS

Table one shows that both husbands and wives expressed happiness with their marriages. The modal response is "very happy", followed by "pretty happy." Far fewer spouses answered "not too happy." Husbands, on the average, were slightly more likely to be positive than wives about their marital happiness. ($p = .07$).

TABLE 1

In Table 2 it is shown that never having had a child is associated with slightly less marital happiness for husbands, but more happiness for wives. However, for neither is the difference statistically significant. Overwhelmingly, these respondents now have or have had children at some time.

TABLE 2

Table 3 compares the marital happiness of those who had a minor child at home of any age with those who did not. Husbands seem little affected, but wives with children are less happy with their marriages ($p = .09$).

TABLE 3

To further explore the relationship between children and marital happiness, the age of the youngest child is shown in

Table 4. The youngest child tended to be five years of age or under. For husbands, there was no significant relationship between not having a child or having a youngest child in any particular age category and marital happiness. However, for wives, a difference is shown. Wives who had no minor child at home were significantly happier with their marriages than those who were mothers with a youngest child six to twelve years of age ($p = .02$). For mothers whose youngest child was in the other age categories, little difference is shown in marital happiness as compared to wives without a minor child at home.

TABLE 4

Data regarding number of children and marital happiness are shown in Table 5. The more children a father has ever had, the happier he is with his marriage ($r = .14$, $p = .02$). To the contrary, mothers who have had more children are less happy ($r = -.08$, $p = .10$). The number of children under six is positively, but not significantly, related to happiness. However, the number of children 6-12 is negatively correlated with happiness for both fathers and mothers ($r = -.13$, $p = .03$; $r = -.12$, $p = .02$, respectively). Numbers of teenagers is related to more happiness for fathers but less for mothers ($r = .09$, $p = .10$; $r = -.14$, $p = .01$). Total number of minor children at home shows no relationship to happiness at all for men, but more children at home are significantly related to less marital happiness for women ($r = -.11$, $p = .04$). To include adult children, other relatives, friends, and others, the total number of persons in the household is shown also. For husbands, total household size

had little relationship to marital happiness. For wives, there is an inverse relationship ($r = -.09, p = .07$). Wives in larger households were less happy.

TABLE 5

Table 6 contains variables that are of intrinsic interest, but are specifically of interest here as they are likely to be interrelated with both the independent and dependent variables of this study. These are: age, education, health, and frequency of church attendance of the respondent; household income; and spouse's education level. For husbands the only statistically significant variable is frequency of church attendance. Husbands who attend church more frequently report greater marital happiness ($r = .15$, $p = .01$). For wives, age, education, health, and frequency of church attendance all are positively related to marital happiness (r's = .08 to .14, p's = .01 to .10). On the contrary, household income and spouse's education show no relationship at all to marital happiness for these wives. ($r = .00$).

TABLE 6

As a number of the variables already discussed are highly correlated among themselves, and the sample size is moderate, the multivariate analysis includes a combination of those variables of greatest research interest in this study plus those of greatest predictive potential. Variables entered in the multiple regression are numbers of children in the three age categories, and respondent's age, frequency of church attendance, health, and education (Table 7).

TABLE 7

For husbands the relationships between numbers of children in two age categories and happiness are significant, but they are of opposite direction. Number of children 6-12 years old is negatively correlated with happiness (beta = -.125, p = .05), while number of teenagers is positively correlated (beta = .111, p = .07). Number of children under 6 years is positively related to marital happiness for husbands but it is not statistically significant (beta = .096, p = .12).

Frequency of church attendance is significantly and positively related to marital happiness for husbands (beta = .139, p = .03). Likewise, health and age are positively related to happiness, but not significantly. Education is very slightly negatively associated with happiness, but this may well be from sampling error.

For wives, the number of children under six years also is positively related to marital happiness (beta = .135, p = .04). To contrast, number of teenagers is negatively related (beta = -.104, p = .06). Numbers of children 6-12 years also is negatively correlated, but not significantly (beta = -.072, p = .16). Most closely related to marital happiness for wives are age (beta = .231, p = .01) and health (beta = .160, p = .01). Education and church attendance are positively related to happiness, but not significantly.

It is particularly interesting to note that the relationship between children and marital happiness is similar for both hus-

bands and wives in the multivariate analysis for two age groups, but is opposite for teenagers.[3] The number of youngest children (0-5 years), when controlling for the other variables in the equation, is equated with happier marriages. On the other hand, the number of six to 12 year olds is associated with less happiness. To further complicate the picture, teenagers are associated with happier fathers but less happy mothers.

All other variables in the multivariate equation are positively related to marital happiness for both husbands and wives except education, which shows a negative but far from significant beta for husbands.

DISCUSSION

To generalize, the presence of minor children in the home is associated with lower marital happiness for these black wives, but not necessarily for their husbands. However, when we specify the relationships in more detail, we find that the ages of the children appears to be an important factor in the relationship between having minor children at home and marital happiness.

In zero-order relationship, having a child at home or having more children at home is associated with significantly lower happiness for wives. This finding is in line with much previous research, most of which was on whites, however. It does coincide with the findings of Glenn and McLanahan (1982) on black wives in the 1970's, in that number of children was associated with less

marital happiness. However, they did not find a relationship between having no child at all and having one or more on wives' marital happiness.

However, simply looking at presence or absence of and total number of children does not provide as complete a picture of the relationship as does using age categories of children. For wives, it is children of school age (six through seventeen), and not younger children, who are associated with less marital happiness. We might be inclined to equate less marital happiness with having been married longer, as many of those with no minor child, as well as those with older children, will have been married for a number of years. In fact, Table 6 indicates that age and marital happiness are highly related, and, as previously mentioned, age and length of marriage also are highly correlated. However, the relationship remains essentially unchanged in the multivariate analysis, although the number of children 6-12 variable no longer is statistically significant. In addition, the number of preschool children becomes significantly and still positively related to marital happiness.

While previous research on the relationship between children and marital happiness of blacks has not been as detailed as that reported here, some prior research found that having preschool children at home was related to lower marital well-being for white wives (Abbott and Brody, 1985; Glenn and Weaver, 1978). Those who have stressed the importance of the parental role to black women receive support from this finding, at least in regard to having young children in a two-parent household. The presence

of young children does seem to be significantly and positively related to these black wives' marital happiness.

However, the relationship of having older children at home seems as clearly related to lower marital happiness for wives. As age, and therefore, length of marriage, are so highly related to marital happiness, having older children appears to have a negative net effect on marital happiness, independent of length of marriage. Does increased interaction of children with outside influences as they grow older and the decreased possibility of parental supervision lead to stress that is greater than that associated with the intense day-to-day, even minute-to-minute, care provided by many mothers to their young children? Follow-up qualitative research is needed to answer questions such as this.[4]

The relationships between children and the marital happiness of husbands shows both similarities and differences with those of wives. The presence or absence of a minor child, the age of the youngest child, and number of children are not significantly related to husbands' marital satisfaction. This contrasts with the findings on wives. It also contrasts with one finding of Glenn and McLanahan (1982), who found that black fathers in the 1970's who had a child at home were less happy with their marriages. However, as with this study of the 80's, number of children was not significantly related to happiness in that study. As fathers usually are less involved with children than are mothers, it may not be surprising that their happiness is less affected by having children. On the other hand, the marital duties of mothers inevitably impinge upon their marital roles,

with less time available for meeting husbands' needs and desires.

When we look at the number of children in the household in various age groups (Table 5), we see that there are significant relationships with husband's marital happiness. While total numbers of children in the household is not related, number of preschool children is positively related to marital happiness. However, as with mothers, this relationship is not statistically significant. For number of children six to 12 years old, however, we see a significant and negative relationship with happiness. This coincides with the finding for mothers. These young school age children, at least in quantity, seems related to lower marital happiness for both husbands and wives.

The greatest divergence between husbands and wives in these bivariate relationships is the relationship between numbers of teenagers and marital happiness. Wives appear negatively affected in the marital role by having more teenagers; fathers are positively affected. Do fathers take pride in their older children's accomplishments, while mothers are left with the continuing work and worry that has burdened them before? Again, detailed qualitative research is needed to delve into the dynamics involved.

The multivariate analysis addresses these relationships more comprehensively. We find that the zero-order relationships generally hold for husbands. Therefore, these relationships do not seem confounded by the other variables in the equation.

Tables 6 and 7 detail relationships between important variables, other than children, and marital happiness. For wives, in zero-order relation, age (as previously noted), education, health, and frequency of church attendance all are positively related to marital happiness. These findings generally are as expected. However, and perhaps surprisingly, household income and husband's education show no relationship whatsoever to marital happiness ($r = .00$). Previous studies have shown income to be related to marital happiness and other indicators of subjective well-being. For these wives, it seems to be subordinate to other factors, such as their ages. We had expected husband's education to be related to marital happiness, as well. However, it is not, which may result from the negative relationship between respondents' age and husband's education ($r = -.45$, $p<.001$, found in separate analysis). In the multivariate analysis, this last variable is dropped. Wives' ages and their health remain significantly related, but church attendance and education no longer are significant. Other variables considered are more strongly related to marital happiness for wives.

For husbands, frequency of church attendance is the only non-children variable significantly related to marital happiness. Husbands who attend church frequently are happier with their marriages, even when controls are introduced. This is the expected relationship, although its greater significance for husbands then wives was unexpected. An especially important relationship between church and family exists for these black husbands. This may reflect traditionalism in general, which would

be highly correlated with traditionalism in the household division of labor. White and associates (1986) found this latter variable positively correlated with marital happiness for husbands.

Although husband's age, health, spouse's education level, and household income are positively related to happiness, they are not statistically significant. We had expected stronger relationships for at least age, health, and household income. Other variables, such as numbers of children in various age groups, seem more important. This may surprise those who have written of the lack of involvement of black fathers. However, as previously noted, much of the writing has been of poor and broken families, and writers who have focused on intact black families, such as Tatum (1987), have found fathers heavily involved in the day-to-day activities of the family.

CONCLUSION

Black children appear to have a significant impact on their parents' marital happiness. However, the relationship is not a simple one, and seems to involve the ages of the children and their numbers. Preschool children are positively related to marital happiness for both fathers and mothers. Older children are not, although teen-age children are associated with greater happiness for their fathers. Thus, the sex of the parent also appears important in determining how children are involved in marital happiness. Wives appear happiest with their marriages

with few or no minor children, or with young children. Husbands appear happiest with preschool or teen-age children at home. Clearly, children are an important factor in the marital happiness of black husbands and wives, although the relationships are complex.

NOTES

1. An exception is the National Survey of Black Americans conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan in 1979-80. See Broman, 1988; and Coleman, Antonucci, Adelmann, and Crohan, 1987, for examples of family research drawing on this sample.

2. The health item was not included in the 1983 or 1986 GSS surveys.

3. Separate multivariate analysis shows that the total number of minor children in the home is far from statistically significantly related to marital happiness for these husbands and wives. Thus, age of children appears to be an important specification of the relationship.

4. Previous qualitative research on black families often has focused on poor and/or broken families, which greatly limits our ability to generalize those findings to this population of intact black families.

TABLE 1. MARITAL HAPPINESS OF BLACK AMERICANS

Q: "Taking all things together, how would you describe your marriage?"

		Husbands		Wives	
Response	Score[1]	N	%	N	%
Very happy	3	124	53.5	141	49.6
Pretty happy	2	97	41.8	117	41.2
Not too happy	1	11	4.7	26	9.2
Total		232	100.0	284	100.0
		$\bar{x}$ = 2.49		$\bar{x}$ = 2.40	

Sex difference: t = 1.50, p = .07

[1] Note: Reversed from NORC codebook.

TABLE 2. EVER HAVING HAD A CHILD AND MARITAL HAPPINESS

	HUSBANDS			WIVES		
	N	$\bar{x}$	p	N	$\bar{x}$	p
Ever had a child	231	2.49	ns	283	2.40	ns
Yes	207	2.50		249	2.39	
No	24	2.38		34	2.53	

TABLE 3. PRESENCE OF A MINOR CHILD AND MARITAL HAPPINESS

	HUSBANDS			WIVES		
	N	$\bar{x}$	p	N	$\bar{x}$	p
Minor children in home	231	2.48	NS	283	2.40	.09
Yes	132	2.47		169	2.35	
No	99	2.51		114	2.48	

TABLE 4. AGE OF YOUNGEST CHILD AND MARITAL HAPPINESS

	HUSBANDS		WIVES	
	N	$\bar{x}$	N	$\bar{x}$
No minor children in home	99	2.51	114	2.48
Youngest child $\leq$5 years	66	2.50	111	2.42
Youngest child 6-12 years	40	2.33	34	2.09
Youngest child 13-17 years	26	2.62	24	2.38
Total	231	2.48	283	2.40
	$f = 1.47$, NS		$f = 3.33$, $p = .02$	

TABLE 5. NUMBER OF CHILDREN EVER BORN, NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN HOME BY AGE CATEGORY, HOUSEHOLD SIZE, AND MARITAL HAPPINESS

	HUSBANDS		WIVES	
	1 r	2 p	1 r	2 p
Number of children ever born	.14	.02	-.08	.10
Number of children ≤5 years in household	.06	NS	.04	NS
Number of children 6-12 years in household	-.13	.03	-.12	.02
Number of children 13-17 years in household	.09	.10	-.14	.01
Number of children 0-17 years in household	.00	NS	-.11	.04
Number of persons in household	.04	NS	-.09	.07

Note: [1] Zero-order Pearson's r's. [2] Direction predicted.

TABLE 6. SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND MARITAL HAPPINESS

	HUSBANDS		WIVES	
	r	p[1]	r	p[1]
Respondent's age	.07	NS	.13	.01
Respondent's education level	-.01	NS	.08	.10
Respondent's health	.06	NS	.14	.03
R's frequency of church attendance	.15	.01	.08	.10
Household income	.05	NS	.00	NS
Spouses education level	.03	NS	.00	NS

Note: [1] Direction predicted.

TABLE 7. HAPPINESS OF BLACK HUSBANDS AND WIVES: MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

VARIABLE	HUSBANDS B	BETA	T	p[1]	WIVES B	BETA	T	p[1]
No. of children 13-17	.081	.111	1.47	.07	-.089	-.104	-1.48	.06
Respondent's age	.003	.079	.80	NS	.010	.231	2.68	.01
Church attendance	.033	.139	1.83	.03	.009	.032	.45	NS
No. of children 6-12	-.089	-.125	-1.59	.05	-.066	-.072	-.96	NS
R's health	.059	.096	1.16	NS	1.320	.160	2.08	.01
R's education	-.001	-.010	-.12	NS	.016	.079	1.01	NS
No. of children 0-5	.079	.096	1.14	NS	.112	.135	1.73	.04
Constant	2.036				1.361			
	F = 1.63			NS(.12)	F = 2.64			.01

[1] Note: Probability of T is with direction predicted.

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